

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) collects, maintains and distributes data for scientific and management purposes in the northwest Atlantic Ocean. The Program is a component of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Since implementation in 1989, NEFOP has deployed an average of 35 observers a year in various commercial fisheries. These observers have completed an average of 2300 days at sea annually.

This guide is intended to serve as a general at-sea biological sampling reference for NEFSC fisheries observers. It contains summaries and tables designed to enable observers to quickly determine the correct biological sampling protocols and methods while at sea. While this manual provides identification criteria for selected species that have proved troublesome in the past, observers should mainly rely on the field guides issued in training for species identification.

Biological sampling is one of the most important functions of a fisheries observer. Information and samples collected by observers are often unobtainable by any other method. These data are used in scientific studies and can influence management regulations. It is therefore very important that observers have a thorough understanding of biological sampling principles and practices. Prior to deployment, especially in a new fishery, observers should review all biological sampling protocols and resolve any uncertainty with their supervisor or NEFOP staff.

In addition to this manual, the NEFSC Fisheries Observer Program Manual provides a detailed description of each data field collected. The NEFSC Fisheries Observer Program Training Manual is a textbook for observer trainees as well as a reference for experienced observers containing in-depth instruction on procedures and protocols relating to biological data collection as well as other aspects of the job, such as safety at sea.

This manual represents a revision of the biological sampling protocols described in the 1996 NEFSC Observer Program Manual. All figures contained in this version are from the 1996 edition unless otherwise noted. For documentation of other changes see Documentation of changes made to the NEFSC Biological Sampling Protocols, 2001.